



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH

Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Martin O'Malley, Governor – Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor – Joshua M. Sharfstein, Secretary

MARYLAND BOARD OF MORTICIANS and FUNERAL DIRECTORS

4201 Patterson Avenue • Baltimore, Maryland 21215-2299

SEEKING COOPERATION

We, the Maryland Board of Morticians and Funeral Directors and the Maryland Board of Physicians have a very important common professional responsibility. The medical licensees that are providing the very important professional care to the sick or injured and the dying and the funeral profession licensees that provide professional care to the decedents and their families need to understand that they must coordinate and uphold Maryland law in carrying out their professional duties.

Death certificate forms are free and should be kept in all medical offices and funeral establishments in the State. It is the Board of Morticians and Funeral Directors understanding that, under Maryland law, it is the responsibility of the medical licensee to initiate the death certificate within 24 hours of the notice of the death. It is the mortician or funeral director's responsibility to file the signed death certificate with State vital records within 72 hours after the death occurs. The morticians and funeral directors, often, are not receiving the signed death certificate from the medical licensee until after their filing time limit has passed. This even happens quite frequently in hospitals, long term care facilities and hospices, where medical personnel should be readily available. If a decedent's physician is scheduled off, the person covering those patients, it seems, should be contacted and accept professional responsibility.

The Board of Morticians and Funeral Directors takes this very seriously because of the impact it has on the families of decedents. Final disposition of human remains can not occur without the properly executed death certificate. And, important family estate business can not begin. For instance, in the immediate, life insurance policies can not be used to pay for final dispositional plans. This can impede cultural and religious practice and adds to the grieving process of those left behind.

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Recently, I have received several calls regarding death certificates. In one instance, an attending physician demanded that the Funeral Director fill out the entire death certificate or she would refuse to sign. It is not the responsibility of the morticians and funeral directors to do this and, in fact, the Board instructs their licensees to ONLY fill out the portion assigned to them, lines 5-22. As a courtesy, if the death occurs other than in a medical facility, they will fill out lines 1-4 for your information. They have even been asked to fill out the cause of death! I think we would all professionally agree, this can not continue. Another problem is the cause of death, which all too frequently is listed with the mode of death instead. It would be helpful if medical personnel was entirely familiar with what is an acceptable entry for cause of death. Having to correct death certificates causes additional delay and anguish to the families left behind. And, time and expense to the funeral establishments.

The funeral directors and morticians spend innumerable hours and travel extensive miles to serve families. Serving families in their time of need is why they have continued to take more responsibility than is legally theirs. The Board is supporting that they not continue and notify the family why no death certificate has been filed and report repeated cases to the Board of Physicians. The Morticians and Funeral Directors are not the clerks and couriers for the medical profession. They are professionals who respect those that serve the sick and dying. Please return that small favor and instruct your staff likewise. The abuse of our licensees and the families they serve must end with beginning a new era of cooperation.

Respectfully submitted by
Ruth Ann Arty
Executive Director, Maryland Board
of Morticians and Funeral Directors